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II.—THE ANCIENT RELIGIONS IN UNIVERSAL HISTORY.

Of the many important fields which border on the domain of ancient life and literature, none has recently yielded to explorers ideas of more consequence to the liberation and progress of thought, or is at present richer with promise, than the field of the religions of the Mediterranean nations. Themselves the embodiment of the religious experience of mankind gained through ages of history, the faiths of Egypt, Asia Minor, Greece, and Rome in turn gave place to and entered into the composition of Christianity, which has since girdled the globe and seems destined to become the world-religion; and consequently every detail of their nature and history has a direct and vital bearing upon the civilization of the modern world.

On the other hand, no outlying territory of classical antiquity has been traversed by explorers fewer in number, or more tardily mapped out by competent cartographers for the benefit of the rank and file of travellers. With the Greek and Latin classics so thoroughly searched that the lay mind is in some measure justified in regarding them exhausted as a field of study; with the political, social, military, and constitutional phases of antiquity more or less lucidly set forth in numerous textbooks on ancient history taught in our schools; with ancient art so well written of that he who runs may read; with the private life of the ancients taught in course; with archaeology making strides so rapidly as to force the frequent rewriting of the records of antiquity—with all this, the history, the nature, and the effect upon civilization of the ancient faiths are so far from being in the possession of the world at large that up to very recent years not a single cult of antiquity had been treated in a manner which showed its significance in universal history, or even made its *raison d'être* comprehensible to the average mind among students of antiquity themselves; and even now, appreciation of the subject of ancient religion is limited to the few, and only the pioneer work has been done.

For what has until recently passed under the name of the study of religion has been for the most part the study of religious

mythology—the collation and attempted interpretation of that part of the tales of antiquity which centers about the gods and their cults. I say attempted, for the speculations of the erudite as to the definite origin and inner meaning of the ancient myths have “found no end, in wandering mazes lost.”

But this, useful as it has been, is not really the study of religion. Mythology is the result of man’s attempt to explain why certain cult practices existed, and was so far from being an official product of religion that its tales were the invention of people rather than priest; but the cults themselves were in existence before myths came into being, and constituted the reality of religion. The location and structure of sanctuaries, the peculiar ceremonies employed in worship, the faith in the flowing of this or that consequence from ceremony and conduct, the worshipper’s conception of the relation subsisting between himself and deity—these constitute the real subjects of study in the field of religion, and it is to these that scholarship is now turning. The tradition and interpretation of myth are but the dry husks; the kernel is the point of view of the worshipper, and the conduct to which it leads him.

That scholarship has been tardy in arriving at this intimate study of ancient religion is due to causes which are entirely natural. First of all, there has been until comparatively recent times a deficiency of material. Language and literature alone may afford a basis for the study of myth, but as sources of knowledge regarding actual religious practices and the effect of religion upon life they are comparatively inadequate; the development of the science of archaeology was requisite before the most abundant and most important evidence was fully available—temple remains, sculptural representation, and inscriptions; and it is only within the past few decades that archaeology has finally completed its long evolution from the sporadic and spasmodic occupation of the treasure-seeker, curio-hunter, and dilettante to an activity of severely scientific character.

In the second place, something of the conservatism which characterizes religion itself has been reflected upon the study of it whenever the relations between paganism and the origin and early history of Christianity were under consideration. Such conservatism, not to say prejudice, may belong to the individual, whose preconceptions obscure for him the bearing of ancient religion—for in no subject is prejudice more insidious; and it

may also belong to society at large and reinforce that of the individual. In many countries up to comparatively recent times it would have been an invidious task to publish anything which could be even remotely suspected of detracting from the credit of Christianity and the Church. The pulpit has always been so in the habit, naturally and pardonably, of presenting the ideal aspect of Christianity and magnifying its goodness by holding up in contrast to it the blackest realities of paganism that it has viewed, and still views, with a certain dissatisfaction, if not resentment, any presentation of ancient conditions which displays pagan religion in a favorable light; and to understand intimately the faith of pagan antiquity, or of any other time or people, is to think less harshly of it; for there is no faith which does not rest upon universal qualities of human nature. Indeed the time has not long passed when zealous theologians credited pagan society with no original good, and saw in whatever of its virtues they discerned only a proof that in some mysterious way the ideals of Hebrew literature had partially possessed themselves of the Greeks and Romans. In the good qualities of Egyptian society were seen survivals of the perfect civilization of its Asiatic ancestors before the Fall, and its strange gods were regarded as the debased tradition of original divinely revealed perfect knowledge of deity. Greek mythology was only a corruption of Bible truth. "Since many of the fables", says the introduction to Brooks' Ovid (1848), "are corrupt traditions of Scriptural truths, I have traced them back to the great fount of purity, the Biblical record The introductory part of the work, describing Chaos, the Creation, the deterioration of morals, and the Flood, are in striking accordance with the Biblical record, so that we can hardly persuade ourselves that the author was unacquainted with the sacred writings of the Hebrews."

The result of such preconceptions as these has been that most study of the pre-Christian religions has been and still is limited to the conventional and superficial, concerning itself with cult myths and such rites as for their strangeness and grossness win easy attention, but making little attempt to discover behind the veil of outward practice anything that should savor of spirituality.

But even were evidence more abundant, and conservatism less deterrent, there are other reasons, principally concerned with the individual scholar, why the study of ancient religion has been tardy in its progress. The subject of religion is not one whose meaning

lies on the surface; it has difficulties which are inherent, and which can be overcome only by the scholar of rare qualifications. Nothing is so apparent in the average student of the classics or ancient history, not to say instructor, as the lack of definite points of view regarding the religion of classical civilization. Just as humor is the last quality of a foreign language to be detected and appreciated, so the religious life of a civilization is its last component part to be comprehended.

There is little in this that need cause surprise if we stop to consider that few persons could render to an adherent of another faith an intelligible account of the religion of their own time or even of their own choice. "What you actually believed", writes Andrew Lang to Horace, "we know not, *you* knew not. Who knows what he believes"? There is nothing so elusive as the understanding of religion; let him who does not realize the fact attempt to define it. To one, religion consists in obedience to certain prescriptions; another thinks of it as an attitude, and despises all form. To one, it is "to visit the fatherless and widows in their affliction, and to keep himself unspotted from the world"; to another, religion is unrelated to ethics. Matthew Arnold sees in it "morality touched with emotion"; to Professor Santayana, "religion is poetry become the guide of life, poetry substituted for science or supervening upon it as an approach to the highest reality"; an unsophisticated child (I quote Grant Allen) would define it as "saying your prayers, and reading your Bible, and singing hymns, and going to church or to chapel on Sundays"; while an Italian peasant would say it was "offering up candles and prayers to the Madonna, attending Mass, and remembering the Saints on every festa."

And yet it is plain that the ideal scholar in religion must understand the religion of his own time if he is to be able to appreciate religion in general, and especially that of antiquity. He must also be able to lift himself out of his own mental habit and to accommodate himself in imagination to the environment, both physical and intellectual, of another time and people; and he must be so open-minded as not to allow his own prejudice to color his judgment of the religious conditions of antiquity.

All this requires a broad and mature mind; but it calls for still another qualification which is even more rare. The successful interpreter of ancient religious life must be sympathetic. He must possess so much of the spirit of kindness and tolerance as

habitually to be disposed to search for reasonable explanations of whatever that is gross and barbarous he may find in ancient religious practice, and must be so much a student of human nature as to be able to discover the motives which lie behind the actions of man in his rudest state. No one who is accustomed to sneer at ignorance and superstition, or to think that his own time or his own sect possesses all truth, or fails to realize that the superstitions of today were the religions of yesterday, will be qualified for a successful study of the ancient faiths.

But the gap between modern times and Saturn's reign is a wide one, and the connection of the surviving fragments of evidence regarding antiquity so imperfectly apparent that the student of them must add intuition to his sympathy. He must see and understand the evidence which is present, and yet have a vision of evidence which is not seen. On the other hand, intuition is a dangerous gift, and with it must go a patience and industry which are untiring, and which will refuse to give too free a rein to it. For the erudition of the successful investigator and interpreter must be enormous. He must know the classical literatures and epigraphy, be familiar with the monuments which are scattered over Europe both in museums and on sites, be conversant with the vast literature of mythological and religious investigation, and possess an intimate acquaintance with all phases of ancient life.

With a requisite of temperamental and intellectual qualities such as the foregoing, it is not strange that efficient interpreters of the ancient faiths have been both slow to appear and few in number. It is not to be wondered at, too, that American scholarship concerns itself so little with this field of investigation. The absence of monuments, the comparative immaturity of scholars and the lack of traditions, something of impatience to get to the end of tasks, much more impatience toward all that seems unreasonable or superstitious, a certain prejudice against all but the simplest forms of worship—are all obstacles to the sympathetic study of ancient religion which are especially characteristic of a country in which civilization is young, conventions few, and activity feverish. It is only natural that Europe has taken the lead in the study and publication of evidence which exists almost exclusively within her borders, and that English, German, and French scholars have been the chief contributors. The failure of Italy to manifest special interest in ancient religious conditions is perhaps due, among other causes, to the fact that whatever religious discussion

her citizens engage in centers almost entirely about the question of the standing of the Church and its head in the politics of the kingdom.

Of the three nationalities which have put forth the greatest effort, each displays special interest in and adaptability to a particular field, though effort has not been limited to it in any case. Among English scholars the main interest has been rather in the origin of religion than in particular phases of the religious history of Mediterranean antiquity, and it is due to them principally that the anthropological method has attained to such prominence. The services of Germany, while extended in every direction, have consisted especially in the patient gathering and ordering of the vast amount of material which now forms the basis of every effort at interpretation. The most striking contributions of French scholarship—and here, for convenience, may be included the Belgian Franz Cumont, of the University of Ghent—have been in the interpretation of ancient religious phenomena, especially as related to the oriental cults at Rome, and in the presentation to the world of an account of them which is not only welcomed by specialists, but at the same time so illuminating and assimilable that it enters into the conception of universal religious history formed by the wider circle of educated people.

The enumeration of some of the more important contributions of the past few decades will serve to define more clearly the present status and trend of the study of ancient religion.¹ Among works which have had to do with the assembling of facts and the laying of the foundations for all attempts at appreciation are to be mentioned the monumental Roschers Lexicon, a mine of mechanically presented detail now in process twenty-four years, and still uncompleted; Stengel's *Kultusaltertümer* (1898), a treatment of cult forms in Greek religion; Gruppe's recent unwieldy work on *Griechische Religion und Mythologie*, too indiscriminately packed with erudition to be of the greatest service; Farnell's *Cults of the Greek States* (1895-1907, still incomplete); Wissowa's *Religion und Kultus der Römer* (1902), a thorough and conservative presentation of Roman religion comprising in large part the superseded Marquardt's *Religion der Römer* together with the results of the latest investigation; Aust's

¹ A detailed report, by L. Bloch, upon the progress of scholarship, principally German, in this field may be found in the supplement to Bursians *Jahresbericht* (1905).

Religion der Römer (1899), a limited presentation of Wissowa's content which also served as a forerunner of that author's work; Warde-Fowler's Roman Festivals (1899), a useful manual on the religious observances of the Republic; and Carter's Religion of Numa and Other Essays on the Religion of Ancient Rome (1906), an attractive work of historical nature by an American scholar.

Among works on individual cults may be mentioned Foucart's *Les grands Mystères d'Eleusis* (1900), made possible by the excavation of the Eleusinian precinct; the same scholar's *Le culte de Dionysos* (1904); Showerman's *The Great Mother of the Gods* (1901), an American dissertation, tracing the history of a single cult, that of Cybele, from its inception in Asia to the fall of paganism in 394 A. D.; Hepding's *Attis, Seine Mythen und sein Kult* (1904), a like treatment of the companion deity of the Great Mother; and, immeasurably more important than any of these, Franz Cumont's *Textes et Monuments figurés relatifs aux Mystères de Mithra* (1896-9), the only really exhaustive work on a single pagan cult which has yet appeared. Cumont's Conclusions, separated from the whole work, have been translated into English (1903), and form a most enlightening volume for the general reader.

Lastly, as an index of the attempts of scholarship to interpret particular phases of religious development, may be noticed here Rohde's *Psyche* (1898) on the ancient belief in immortality of the soul; Reville's *La religion à Rome sous les Sévères* (1886); Lafaye's *Histoire du culte des divinités d'Alexandrie hors de l'Égypte* (1884), a sympathetic treatment of the Egyptian cults; and, closely allied to the foregoing in purpose, and comprising their conclusions with those of others on the subject of the oriental religions, Cumont's *Les religions orientales dans le paganisme romain* (1907), eight lectures delivered before the *Collège de France* and at Oxford, summing up the results of the study of the oriental religions in their relation to universal religious history.

If we add to the foregoing list the works of the anthropological school in England, most of which deal more or less with the Mediterranean religions: Tylor's *Primitive Culture* (1873), a pioneer work of great influence upon subsequent study; Lang's *Myth, Ritual, and Religion* (1887), and other publications of the same author; Jevons' admirably written *Introduction to the History of Religion* (1896), the most serviceable book for the general reader; Robertson-Smith's *Religion of the Semites*

(1894); Grant Allen's *The Evolution of the Idea of God* (1901); Frazer's *Golden Bough* (1900), and Adonis, Attis, Osiris (1906), we shall have indicated at least the general character of recent scholarly activity in the study of ancient religion.

Out of these activities have sprung results of four kinds: first, a great mass of material to be drawn upon by future investigators; second, a well-ordered outline of the history of paganism at Rome; third, a few accounts, most of them inadequate, of individual cults; and fourth, certain conclusions of importance regarding the significance of the ancient faiths in history. It is to be noted that on the whole, in spite of the comparative fewness of monuments, Roman religion yields to historical treatment with greater facility than Greek religion, and that its place in history is more easily seen—facts due to Rome's character as the great systematizer of the ancient world.

Of the four results above mentioned, the last is possessed of the greatest value—naturally, for it is the fruitage of all the others. We are richer by far than we were a score of years ago in resources which enable us to appreciate the significance of both the religion of today and that of antiquity, and to judge with intelligence of the religion of the future.

In the first place, few longer seriously question the validity of the anthropological method. Whether we see in animism the beginning of all religious belief, or take the worship of the spirits of the departed as the germ from which the conception of God was evolved, or believe with Usener that the first step was a sense, not of *the* infinite, but of *something* infinite, we arrive at the same conclusion: religion is the product of evolution, and had its beginnings in savagery—"the Gods were the invention of wild and bestial folk, who, long before cities were builded or life was honorably ordained, fashioned forth evil spirits in their own savage likeness; ay, or in the likeness of the beasts that perish". There are not many now who will attribute the accidental grossnesses of ancient religions rather to forgetfulness of originally perfect knowledge and to decadence than to the survival of savage customs from a primitive day. The tendency is rather toward the view, expressed by Grant Allen, that "the world has never really had more than one religion—of many names, a single central shape"—nor is there much likelihood of future generations hearing a pagan religion denominated by a historian as "a blasphemous anticipatory parody of Christianity", or the sacramental

meal of a savage race called "a satanic imitation of the Communion."

Again, the nature of the relation between religion and mythology has been clearly defined. Works on Greek and Roman mythology are no longer regarded as affording a basis for the study of religion, nor is comparative philology and what it has to say of the likenesses between Vedic and Greek myth-names looked to for a solution of questions concerning the origin of Greek gods. Mythology is not theology, nor had it to do in the least with actual religious practice, though it may accidentally communicate some truth regarding a cult. Mythology is merely story-telling, and originated long after the practices were begun to which it was the attempt to give a local habitation and a name. Obligation to believe it there was none; its tales formed no canon, and might be varied *ad libitum* by poet, priest, or worshipper; and if the truth could be known, it would doubtless be found that the priest least of all was responsible for their creation. Orthodoxy did not have its ground in belief, but in religious practice; creeds as such did not exist, and the individual was orthodox who performed his duties before deity without omission. Hence the comparative absence in antiquity of congregational gatherings and preaching.

But if dogma was at the minimum, there was no laxity regarding cult practice. Religious guilt was not a merely private and individual matter; it involved the community as well. The improper performance of a ceremony by the omission, addition, or perversion of a single detail roused the wrath of deity, and the State itself might suffer until the mistake was corrected or the guilty person punished.

The differences between ancient and modern religious conditions, however, are neither so striking nor so illuminating as the resemblances; and it is for the pointing out of the latter that the present generation is most in debt to scholarship. For it is in this field that the vital connection between paganism and Christianity is most clearly seen—the underlying causes of the long and painful struggle which led to the triumph of the latter, and the process of compromise and assimilation by which the victor possessed itself of whatever it could utilize of the organism of the vanquished.

It is hardly a matter of accident that the greatest measure of obligation for the clarification of our ideas regarding the inner

meaning of paganism at Rome under the Empire is to scholars of French blood. To easy access to the monuments, to a patience and industry almost German, to the powers of logic, the open-mindedness, and the genius for clear expression for which they are noted, the French add a certain intimate understanding of religious institutions which is sprung from the traditional existence of the Roman Church in their midst, and what is greater, the sympathetic attitude which flows from the artistic intuition of a Latin race—the same artistic intuition which enabled pagan Italians of the Renaissance to create convincing Madonnas out of the flesh and blood of their time. The real nature of the Alexandrian cults at Rome is first lucidly set forth by Lafaye; it is to Reville that we owe the first clear analysis of the religious situation at Rome during the early third century; while Cumont in his monumental work on Mithras, his *Les religions orientales*, and numerous monographs and articles, has rendered special service by throwing floods of light on the motives as well as the practices of Roman paganism during the struggle with Christianity.

These and other investigators of the oriental religions have been fortunate in subject and period alike—in subject, because the oriental religions were more in the nature of faiths than the religion of the West, more genial and human; and in period, because they chose for their study the time of the great transition from ancient to modern religion. During the hundreds of years of her existence Rome had enlarged her circle of deities by the reception of cults first from the immediate neighborhood, next from Etruria, then from Magna Graecia and Greece, and finally had blended the whole into a State system out of which the vitality was beginning to fade by the second Punic war, and which was so far inadequate to the needs of State and individual in the time of Augustus as to be the subject of attempted reform. The coming of the oriental cults—Cybele, the Great Mother, in B. C. 204; Isis in the century succeeding; Syrian Baal and Astarte and Persian Mithras soon following—was due to real religious need. The fulness of time for their contribution was come, and the great success which attended them from the first century of the Christian era, when they had become accommodated to western environment, was due to their capacity to satisfy the same religious need which had made possible their coming.

The oriental religions have in fact been greatly misunderstood. The conception of them as coming to Rome from a corrupt and decayed civilization and breeding corruption in western society is not justified. The orient was not at that time, as now, decadent, but was the seat of wealth and culture. The spread of her religions to Rome was only one feature of the operation of oriental influence throughout the Empire, of which emperor-worship, luxury, the organization of Diocletian's court on eastern models, and the removal of the capital to the Bosphorus were other evidences.

The view is as little justified which represents the oriental cults themselves as corrupt and decadent; though this is a common misconception to which the fact of their attempted suppression by the Roman government, and the gross nature of some of their rites, seem to lend encouragement. But it must be kept in mind that these barbarous and often revolting rites were the cumbersome tradition of the savage customs of remote and primitive ages in the wilds of the East, which the conservatism always natural in religion had kept alive even into times when their original meaning had been forgotten; and that in proportion as the worshipper became more enlightened they were interpreted as the symbols of the deep things of God. When once these religions had become fairly naturalized in Italy under the influence of the more austere morals of western society, the strange rites which had at first so shocked the Roman mind, accustomed as it was to the colder and more formal worship of its own creation, were found to be invested with a degree of spirituality unknown to the native faiths—a spirituality which became deeper under the tendency of the times. A judgment of the religion of the ancients based upon the outward appearance of its rites alone is as likely to be distorted as an estimate of Christianity would be if formed from the sight of certain forms in modern ritual without knowledge of their spiritual significance.

Unaccustomed as we are to the view, it is nevertheless true that the paganism of the centuries preceding the triumph of Christianity was really characterized by a spiritualizing tendency. Greek philosophy, which had long since undermined the ancient faiths of Greece and Rome, now culminated in Neoplatonism, and began to build up the remnants of the crumbling structure on a new foundation by interpreting all religious ritual and myth as only outward symbols of inward spiritual truth, and teaching men to

see in all religious manifestations the expression of the same great divine essence. The oriental religions, too, possessing a unique warmth and geniality, were not less influential in bringing about the same result, and contributed a great impulse to the wave of spiritualization on which they themselves were in turn carried forward.

For their success was due neither to economic causes nor to a degeneration of western society. It rested on foundations more substantial. In contrast to the more stately and formal Roman religion, the oriental faiths, with their hoary eastern traditions, their basis of science and culture, their fascinating ceremonial, exciting mysteries, and compassionate deities, their appeal to conscience, their provision for purification, and their promise of reward in a future life, satisfied the individual soul. They were personal rather than civic. There was also a certain measure of solidarity which characterized them as a class; varied as were their contributions to the religious life of Roman society, they were similar in spirit.¹

The truth of this assertion may be seen by passing in review the causes of success which accompanied each cult. Cybele, the contribution of Phrygia, was the kindly Great Mother of all being. The original bloody and revolting rites which still clung to her cult soon came to be spiritually apprehended: Attis, her son-lover-companion, represented the fruits of the earth, which spring, grow, decay, die, and revive, while in the Mother was seen Mother Nature, who rejoices at the birth and mourns at the death of her child. The blood baptism of the taurobolium purified and regenerated the soul. The religion of Isis owed its success to the ideality which its doctrines assumed, to its growth in purity and spirituality, to the attractiveness of its rites, to the sympathetic nature of its deities, and to its promises of immortality. The Baal of the Syrians, omnipotent and universally benignant, omnipresent, deathless and eternal, needed only to be conceived as isolated from the actual world of man to become the Christian God. Persian Mithraism, with the emphasis which it placed upon truth, loyalty, purity, justice, and fraternity, with its doctrine of dualism and its promises of salvation to the faithful good who aided in the everlasting campaign against the evil, was especially adapted

¹ For what follows I am indebted for the most part to Cumont, *Les religions orientales dans le paganisme romain*, of which it is to be hoped that an English translation will appear.

to satisfy the more austere moral element of Roman society as well as those who craved fellowship human and divine. Even astrology, scientific insofar as it was founded upon observation of nature, but yet essentially a faith rather than a science, met with a favorable reception because it taught the solidarity of universal creation, the existence of an all-uniting bond of sympathy, and appealed to the human desire of fellowship with the infinite.

Orientalism thus filled the empty shell of paganism at Rome with fresh and vigorous substance, and was a step in the orderly evolution of religion. Such was its prominence during the second, third, and fourth centuries that comparatively little is heard of other pagan religions. It was the cults of Mithras, Isis, and the Great Mother which entered into the fiercest rivalry with Christianity; it was they which bore the brunt of Christian attack when the tide began to turn; and it was they which figured most prominently on the occasion of the last revival of paganism, under Eugenius in 394; and when the course of paganism was run, it was through them that Christianity received for assimilation and transmission the fruits of pagan religious experience.

They were of course not the only cults at Rome, though they far exceeded others in prominence. The old State cults still survived, and numerous private cults. There were few religions of the ancient world which were unrepresented at Rome. The city was filled with gods. Even at the end of the first century, the satirist declared that one could more easily find a god at Rome than a man, and the number multiplied in the succeeding centuries. The age of Constantine must have seen a number and variety of religions at Rome unexampled in the history of any city in the world.

But the whole disordered and incongruous mass was nevertheless so thoroughly impregnated by two influences—Neoplatonism and orientalism—that it may after all with some degree of reason be called a single religion. It may also be said even to have possessed something like a theology. At any rate, there existed a fund of doctrines, held more or less in common, among which were the following: adorability of the cosmic bodies and the elements; the universal reign of one eternal and omnipotent God, with messenger attendants to execute his will; spiritual significance of the gross survivals which still clung to some of the cults; eternal happiness in the after world as a result of prescribed religious conduct; the probation on earth of the soul, a spark of

the universal spirit, before return to its original home; the punishment of the evil in an abysmal depth at the extremity of the world; the necessity of unceasing struggle by the good against the evil; the destruction of the universe by flood or fire, the death of the wicked, and the eternal felicity of the good in a reconstructed world.

With this understanding of the paganism of the later Empire, it is easy to appreciate its strength and persistence before the assaults of Christianity, and the bitterness of the rivalry between them, as well as the facility with which pagan society, once its cause was devoid of hope, turned to the new religion. Had the oriental religions been so rotten at the core as is commonly conceived, their resistance before a new and reasonable religion like Christianity would have been short-lived indeed. The real cause of the bitterness of the struggle lay in the resemblances between them and Christianity rather in their dissimilarities. The paganism of Symmachus and Praetextatus resembled the Christian faith far more than it resembled the religion of Augustus, and the pagan of the fourth century was not without seemingly good grounds for the claim that his faith could afford the worshipper a spiritual benefit equal to that promised by Christianity itself.

How numerous and how convincing were the parallels which the pagan might draw, if he chose, between Christianity and his own faith, may be judged from an enumeration of some of the features of Mithraism: the humility, democracy, and fraternal spirit of its communities; the identification of its deity with light and the sun; the legends of the flood, of the ark, and of adoring shepherds with gifts; the depiction in relief of the fiery chariot, and the drawing of water from the rock; the use of bell, candle, and holy water; the communion; the doctrines of resurrection, immortality, mediation of the Logos, atonement, warfare between good and evil, and the final triumph of the righteous. Add to these the parallels of the Virgin and Christ with Isis and Osiris, Venus and Adonis, Cybele and Attis, etc., with all that such parallels imply in the matter of belief, ritual, and festival, and the opportunity of the pagan is made still more clear.

It is possible that some of these resemblances were more apparent than real, and that pagan doctrines were largely intellectual, with little effect upon conduct. The mind reverts to the cruelty of the amphitheater, and doubts the possibility of the spiritual life in such a society. But the writings of Seneca and of

Marcus Aurelius must be remembered, and the lives of many of their contemporaries; the old-time faith of farm and fireside must be taken into account; and the fact must not be lost sight of that the bond between religion and conduct has never been very strong. If pagan religion failed to restrain its followers, the same was true many times of Christianity, whose supporters were capable of rending each other in their own sanctuaries, and sometimes had to be curbed by a pagan Prefect.

But the resemblances were at any rate strong enough to be the basis of mutual recrimination. To assert with authority, however, that either religion consciously borrowed from or imitated the other during their life side by side at Rome, is impossible. Christianity was already a distinct and well developed religion on its arrival at Rome, and during the period of persecution and struggle can hardly have been much affected by paganism. It is more probable that the resemblances between it and the oriental religions were grounded in a common origin in the East; and it is Asia Minor, among the Judæo-pagan communities in the midst of which Christianity had its inception and took on its first strength, which must be the field of this phase of study.

Be that as it may, the victory of Christianity in the fourth century had as one of its results the reception not only of pagan converts, but of much that belonged to pagan religion. Whether the process consisted for the most part in the Church's merely setting the seal of approval upon those pagan doctrines and practices which resembled her own, and which were common to both from the Asiatic period of their history; or whether we accept the less probable explanation of Reville, who says that "the intransigence of Christianity was ecclesiastical rather than doctrinal. All the while that paganism was being Christianized, Christianity was being paganized. A day came when the two forces had approached each other so nearly as to blend; and from this blending was born Catholicism. The syncretistic reform of paganism, independently of the action exercised on the latter by the Church during the first three centuries, contributed as much to it as Christianity proper"—we must recognize with De Cheyney (*Bible Problems*, 1904) that "the Christian religion is a synthesis, and only those who have dim eyes can assert that the intellectual empires of Babylonia and Persia have fallen."

The effect produced upon the minds of many by these conclusions may be analogous to that wrought on the minds of some

lovers of Shakespeare who, when they are told that the dramatist worked with material all ready to his hand, entertain a feeling of disappointment and resentment. The sentiment, however, is as unreasonable in the one case as in the other. Christianity needs no apologist for not having grown to maturity untouched by the influences of the pagan world; the endurance of it and the effect of its work are the best warrants of the genuineness of its commission. In the ingathering and conservation of all that was worth while in pagan antiquity is to be seen its chief glory. Sprung into existence in the shadow of the sublimest of ancient faiths, at a time late enough in the history of civilization for it to escape the burden of barbarous heritage which cumbered other cults from the East, sent forth on its errand among peoples whose faiths were so burdened, by the power of its purity and earnestness it finally succeeded in attracting to itself all the good of its time. If it came to be burdened with some of the dross also, that was a misfortune due to the human instruments through which it worked. "Christianity did not awake into being the religious sense", says Aust, "but it afforded that sense the fullest opportunity of being satisfied; and paganism fell because the less perfect must give place to the more perfect, not because it was sunken in sin and vice. It had out of its own strength laid out the ways by which it advanced to lose itself in the arms of Christianity; and to recognize this does not mean to minimize the significance of Christianity. We are under no necessity of artificially darkening the heathen world; the light of the Evangel streams into it brightly enough without this."

The effect upon faith of a recognition of the synthetic nature of Christianity ought on the contrary to be salutary. If any view of its origin is productive of pessimism and despair, it is that which teaches that the primitive Christian religion and its disciples were free from imperfection, with the necessary implication that the modern Church and its followers are found wanting; while if any conception lies at the root of a sane optimism, it is that which sees in the Christianity of antiquity a divinely appointed but imperfect human agency for the ingathering of universal religious experience, and in modern Christianity the heir to the riches of all the ages, still imperfect, but still shining more and more unto the perfect day.

GRANT SHOWERMAN.